

FRANK OLSON: "Welcome to this chamber of horrors...."

So begins the third, and most harrowing, of Evan Hause and Gary Heidt's installment in their operatic Defenestration Trilogy, *Man: Biology of a Fall*.

The writers that previously created works about the final, fateful days of Edwin Armstrong (inventor of FM) and James Forrestal (the first U.S. Secretary of Defense) have saved their most ambitious effort for last, an imagining of the final 1953 week of the life of Dr. Frank Olson, army biochemist secretly murdered for knowing too much and for having a conscience. His mythic case touches upon dark secrets about biological warfare, mind control, interrogations, the CIA and the early days of LSD "research."

The most efficient accident, in simple assassination, is a fall of 75 feet or more onto a hard surface....In chase cases it will usually be necessary to stun or drug the subject before dropping him. Blows should be directed to the temple, the area just below and behind the ear, and the lower, rear portion of the skull.—1950's CIA Assassination Manual

In 1952 Frank Olson was the Chief of Operations at Fort Detrick in Frederick, Maryland, the nexus of offensive chemical and biological weapons research from the 1940's through the 1960's. In mid-1953 he intimated to the wrong people that he was having reservations about activities he was seeing on his travels abroad that could be described as the torture of POWs in the interest of mind control research. On November 19, 1953 he was slipped LSD by CIA superior, Sidney Gottlieb, ostensibly to see whether he would divulge secrets or not. Four days later he tried to quit his job. He was coaxed instead into flying to New York City for psychiatric treatment. On November 28, 1953 he was dead, having "fallen or jumped" (as the family was told) from the 10th story window of the Statler Hotel. (Thus the birth of the popular mantra, take LSD and you may jump out a window.)

Frank Olson did not die as a consequence of a drug experiment gone awry. He died because of security concerns regarding disavowed programs of terminal interrogation and the use of biological weapons in Korea. -Olson family press statement, August 8, 2002

Due to the efforts of one of Dr. Olson's sons, enough evidence was found in the 1990's to depict the extremely well-covered case as a murder, though the case was not, and could not, be tried successfully in court.

*"He's gone."
"That's too bad."*

-Telephone call placed from Frank Olson's room at the Statler Hotel moments after his plunge, as overheard by the telephone switchboard operator and reported immediately to the night manager.

perfect murder - How an assassination training unit of the Israeli Mossad referred to Olson's case in their curriculum.

Gary Heidt's libretto offers a no-holds-barred kaleidoscope of drama, history, science, social satire, and fantasy that resounds with present-day relevance. Hause's music

provides a prismatic, circus-like underpinning, drawing upon use of chamber orchestra and live electronics; and musical styles from the Renaissance to Americana including 1950's beat poetry rap. The largely male cast employs every voice type from Bass to Countertenor.

Olson's "chamber of horrors" is a world we could want to visit only as a macabre museum exhibit with "Man" on display, viewed through the glass case of musical and theatrical artifice.

Do not be surprised to encounter Wagnerian emotion and Vaudevillian schtick side-by-side; Bergian bite and evanescent alt-rock love music; rock opera and Third Stream jazz; Denny-esque cocktail music and droning Messiaenic soliloquy. Live electronics are employed to enhance the funhouse-mirror effect, distorting and multiplying musical motives as though they were germs in a bio-weapons lab.

Heidt's conspiracy-theory libretto imparts a similarly psychedelic effect, emphasizing the near-ridiculous, "strange but true" elements of the story: the development of a "swizzlestick of death," testing of anthrax on monkey and human subjects, visitation of a famed magician, depiction of a kinky Greenwich Village party pad funded by the CIA as a

"He's an Allergist, not a
Therapist" – *in reference to
consulting physician,
Harold Abramson*

safehouse. Audiences may be entertained, educated, appalled, moved, and provoked by the twisted opera-theatric odyssey that brings the Hause-Heidt Defenestration Trilogy (2000-2007) to a shattering conclusion.

"Where else can I lie, kill, cheat, steal,
rape, and pillage with the sanction
and blessing of the Most High?"
George White, interrogations "expert"

And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm.
And the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
that this play is the tragedy, "Man"
And its hero,
The Conqueror Worm.

-- Edgar Allen Poe

~~~~~